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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE BLENDING OF PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN ANGLO-SAXON  
LITERATURE, AS SEEN IN THE TREATMENT  
OF SUPERNATURALISM

Submitted by

Charles Daniel Utt

(A. B., Pacific Union College, 1917)

In partial fulfilment of requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

1928

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# THE BLENDING OF PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN ANGLO-SAXON

## LITERATURE, AS SEEN IN THE TREATMENT

### OF SUPERNATURALISM

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## I. INTRODUCTORY

1. Historical Note.--The history of the early ancestors of the English race before they came under the influence of Christianity is shrouded in obscurity, but from the comparatively meagre literature that has come down to us we may glean some facts with reference to their general character and the ideals that they cherished.

The original home of the Angles, or English, was in Denmark and northern Germany on the shores of the Baltic and North seas. Some of the existing Anglo-Saxon literature, though possibly not written until after the migration to England, has a continental setting and preserves the old heroic spirit of the Teutons.

Bede is our chief source of information concerning the coming of the English to Britain. The three tribes, Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, who came first it is said at the invitation of the native Britons (1) to help the latter against the Picts and Scots who were harassing them from the North, remained in Britain. This was about the middle of the fifth century, some forty years after the leaving of the Romans. They gradually extended their dominion over the whole of Britain, which later became known as England, or the land of the Angles.

(1) Bede, Eccl. Hist., I, 14, 15.



## I. INTRODUCTION

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2. Early National Literature.--The body of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon literature is very meagre, for there is only one poem of any considerable length, Beowulf, an epic of 3182 lines, and all the other writings are short pieces or mere fragments. And, further, it may be said that among these scanty remnants we have no purely pagan literature, for those generally assigned to the early period contain more or less of Christian coloring and retouching. But, notwithstanding this fact, underneath is still observable the old heroic spirit of Teutonic paganism. What we have is sufficient to introduce us to early English thought and life and manners.

For the purpose of the present study it will not be necessary to give descriptions of these works or enter into the discussion of critical questions concerning authorship or sources. I shall endeavor rather to describe the religious mind of the Anglo-Saxons, especially as it was accustomed to dwell upon the supernatural. This will serve as a basis of comparison in the second part of the essay, when we examine the literature of the Christian period to see how their ideas were modified, and to what extent, by the new elements brought in by Christianity.

Of their military life we naturally know more than of their other employments. Prowess in war was one of their chief virtues. "The march to battle was a religious act, indeed, the most solemn and holy of all. The gods whose sacred emblems were borne before the army, and whose deeds were sung, were believed to be actually present; and in every battle-roar, raised 'with swords and shields,' the warriors hoped to hear the mighty voice of the thunderer" (Thor). (1)

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It does not seem that they loved fighting altogether for its own sake, but for the glory and praise and reward that came to the ones who acquitted themselves valiantly. Beowulf was a hero, a knight-errant before the days of chivalry:

"I desire now therefore, prince of the Bright-Danes, to ask thee one boon. Refuse me not, guardian of warriors, loved friend of the people, now I am come from so far, that I alone with my band of earls, my body of brave men, may cleanse Heorot. I have also learned that the monster in his recklessness takes no thought to use weapons; I then, so may my liege-lord, Hygelac, find pleasure in me, shall think scorn to bear sword or the broad shield, yellow-rimmed, to the battle, but with my hand-grip shall I join with the fiend and fight to the death, foe against foe." (1)

One of the best battle-poems of the early period is the Fight at Finnsburg. It gives us perhaps our most vigorous and animated picture of their fighting and of the intense spirit with which they went into battle. There remains of the poem only a fragment of about forty-eight lines. It enters abruptly into a fierce and bloody conflict, and breaks off just as abruptly.

"But waken ye now, my warriors, have your shields in hand, be forward in the fight, be brave."

"Then rose many a thane, well dight with gold, girded on them their swords. . . Then at the wall was there din of mortal conflict; the curved shield in the hands of the valiant must needs shatter the bone-helm. The hall-floor resounded, till in the fight Garnef, son of Guthlaf, fell first of earth-dwellers there, and about him many good men. The raven wheeled on the wing about the slain, wandered swart and dusky-gleaming. The flash of the swords was as if all Finnsburg were afire. Never heard I tell of sixty victor-warriors bearing themselves

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(1) Beowulf, 426 ff.



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in strife or warsmen more worthily and better, nor ever did swains pay better for the sweet mead than did his warrior-folk pay Hnaef."(1)

In such scenes and descriptions they delighted. This love of combat lived on into the Christian period and found expression in stories of Old Testament battles and heroes, and in legends of the conquests of Christ and the saints.

Their responsiveness to Nature is marked on nearly every page of Anglo-Saxon literature. They were impressed by the phenomena of storm and climate -- the descent of winter, the birth of spring, the storm on land and sea. In one of the Riddles, the Storm Spirit on the Sea thus speaks:

"The billows crash above me while I move,  
No man knows whither, searching out the earth  
In the vast caverns of the sea. Then stirs  
The ocean, and impels the watery mass  
To burst in foam. Fiercely the whale-mere rises  
And shouts aloud and groans in mighty pain,  
While sounds the tramp of floods along the shore.  
Against precipitous cliffs incessantly  
Rocks, sand, and heaving waves and weeds are hurled.  
Yet toiling, robed with the strength of many waters,  
I stir the soil of ocean's ample grounds,  
Nor can I 'scape the whelming tide, till he  
That is my guide allows. O man of wisdom,  
Tell who may wrest me from the encircling grasp  
Of water, when the streams again are stilled,  
And waves that covered me beat harmony." (2)

While they dreaded the freezing blasts of winter, they nevertheless found pleasure in battling with the storm.

"Benumbed by the cold, oft the comfortless night-  
watch hath held me  
At the prow of my craft as it tossed about under  
the cliffs. . . .  
No heart for the harp has he, nor for acceptance of  
treasure,  
No pleasure has he in a wife, no delight in the world,  
Nor in aught save the roll of the billows; but always  
a longing,  
A yearning uneasiness, hastens him on to the sea."(3)

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- (1) The Fight at Finnsburg, Child's trans., pp. 89, 90.  
(2) Riddle 3, Brougham's trans. in Cook & Tinker, Poetry, p.71.  
(3) The Seafarer, Pt. I, lines 7, 8, 44-47, Iddings's trans. in Cook and Tinker, Poetry, pp. 45, 46.



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From earliest times they were seamen, and, ever since, Englishmen have loved the sea. They delighted in picturing man's struggle with the sea and in singing of the ocean in all its varying moods. They gloried in their skill in steering the rude "sea-wood" in which they hunted the walrus and the whale on the "whale-road" as much as in their skill with sword and spear.

Throughout Beowulf we catch glimpses of the sea. "It is not without significance that a poem stands at the head of English literature whose subject is the struggle with the waves, and which is permeated by a vivid perception of the sea and of sea life." (1) Sword in hand, on one occasion, Beowulf plunges into the waves to meet the whale fishes amid the icy waters of the northern sea.

This was their outward life. Inside, as we shall see in subsequent parts of this essay, they presented the contrast of a deeply religious nature.

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(1) Ten Brink, p. 28.





3. Teutonic Religion.--The Anglo-Saxons brought with them to England the common religion of the early northern nations of Europe, but the literary monuments of their pagan religion and worship were painstakingly obliterated by the Christian church following its successful conquest of England. The existing literature from the early period before the acceptance of Christianity is strangely silent about the gods they worshiped. But from the fragments of this literature we may glean something of the spirit of their religion. Such expressions as these reveal the souls of these men:

"Let him that may win fame ere death; that shall be best hereafter for a warrior, when life is no more." (1)

"So must a man do when he thinketh to reach in battle enduring fame: he careth naught for his life." (2)

"Death is better for every earl than a life of dishonor." (3)

"A profound and serious conception of what makes man great, if not happy, of what his duty exacts, testifies to the devout spirit of English paganism which the Christian doctrine certainly softened, but did not transform in its innermost nature. The ethical essence of this poetry lies principally in the conception of manly virtue, undismayed courage, the stoical encounter with death, silent submission to fate, in the readiness to help others, in the clemency and liberality of the prince toward his

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(1) Beowulf, 1388.

(2) id., 1536.

(3) id., 2889.



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For an idea of their gods we must go to the literatures of other Teutonic nations, principally to the Norse and Icelandic, for it was among these more northern nations that the original paganism endured unmodified for some five centuries after it was supplanted by the Christian religion among the Anglo-Saxon branch of the Teutonic race.

The Voluspa and the Eddas of Norse and Icelandic mythology are sources of the oldest traditions of pagan Scandinavia, and contain outlines of the most ancient northern mythology. The Voluspa (2) most probably represents many of the ancient Saxon traditions held in common with the other nations of the North. It tells of a time when the earth was not yet formed, and of the great gods Odin and Thor, as well as of other lesser mythological beings, such as Valkyries, giants, and dwarfs. Valhalla, where Odin receives the souls of the heroes slain in Battle, is mentioned; also Hel, or Hela, the goddess who presided over the place of all other dead, both good and bad. It contains the account of the son of Odin, who slew the Midgard serpent in a manner similar to Beowulf's encounter with the monsters. Doubtless most, if not all, of these mythological conceptions were known to the Anglo-Saxons and believed by them. (3)

"A number of gods were certainly known both in England and among many, if not all, the Teutonic peoples of the continent, as well as in the North. Among these were Odin

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(1) Ten Brink, p. 29.

(2) Translation of the text of the Voluspa is found in Turner, pp. 207ff, and in Longfellow, p. 37.

(3) Turner, p. 207.



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(1) Ten Brink, p. 28.  
(2) Translation of the text of the Volunga is found in Turner, pp. 207ff, and in Longfellow, p. 27.  
(3) Turner, p. 207.



(Woden), Thor (Thunor), and Tyr (Ti); so also Frigg (Frig), the wife of Odin." (1)

The Anglo-Saxon language itself has preserved the names of these gods for us in the days of the week: Tuesday, from Tiw, the god of darkness and death; Wednesday, from Woden (Odin), in the Edda called the first of the gods (2) and the ancestor of the English kings (3), and referred to in the Nine-herbs charm; Thursday, from Thor, the god of thunder and storm; Friday, from Frea, the Venus of the North (4), a deity of peace and joy and fruitfulness, who brought increase to field and stall; Saturday, probably from an obscure god, Soetere; and the early worship of sun and moon perhaps left its trace in the names of Sunday and Monday (5).

Woden was a "deity of the Anglo-Saxons, the name being the Anglo-Saxon counterpart of the Scandinavian Odin. . . . Owing to the very small amount of information which has come down to us regarding the gods of ancient England and Germany, it cannot be determined how far the character and adventures attributed to Odin in Scandinavian mythology were known to other Teutonic peoples. It is clear, however, that the god was credited with special skill in magic, both in England and Germany." (6)

Thor was "one of the chief deities of the heathen Scandinavians. He is represented as a middle-aged man of enormous strength, quick to anger, but benevolent towards mankind. To the harmful race of giants (demons), on the other hand, he was an implacable foe, and many stories are told in the poetic and prose eddas of the destruction which

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(1) Encyc. Brit., xvi, 683. (2) Turner, p. 197.  
 (3) Bede, i, 15. (4) Palgrave, p. 43.  
 (5) Green, p. 159; Caesar, *Gallie War*, vi, 21; Aelfric, *Hom. on*  
 (6) Encyc. Brit., xxviii, 767. (False Gods.)



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he brought upon them at various times with his hammer. . . .

There is evidence that a corresponding deity named Thunor or Thonar was worshiped in England and on the continent, but little information is obtainable regarding him, except that he was identified with the Roman Jupiter." (1)

One of the giants was Loki. He was "of mixed race, half god, half giant, and wholly mischievous and evil." "In general it may be said that the giants were regarded as hostile to both gods and men." (2)

The men themselves not only loved to fight, as has been mentioned, but they also were fond of telling and hearing heroic tales of war between the gods themselves, and between the gods and the giants. One such story of this struggle between the gods is thus told by Gayley (3):

"When the gods were constructing their abodes, and had already finished Midgard and Valhalla, a certain artificer came and offered to build them a residence so well fortified that they should be perfectly safe from the incursions of the Frost giants and the giants of the mountains. But he demanded for his reward the goddess Freya, together with the sun and moon. The gods yielded to the terms, provided that the artificer would finish the whole work without any one's assistance, and all within the space of one winter. But if anything remained unfinished on the first day of summer, he should forfeit the recompense agreed on. On being told these terms, the artificer stipulated that he be allowed the use of his horse Svadilfari, and this request by the advice of Loki was con-

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(1) Encyc. Brit., xxvi, 876; Dawkins, "Early Man in Britain," p. 490

(2) id., xix, 142; xxvi, 684. (is authority for the worship of Thor

(3) Gayley, pp. 371, 372. (and Odin by the Anglo-Saxons.



he brought upon them at various times with his hammer. . . . There is evidence that a corresponding deity named Thonar or Thonar was worshiped in England and on the continent, but little information is obtainable regarding him, except that he was identified with the Roman Jupiter." (1)

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The men themselves not only loved to fight, as has been mentioned, but they also were fond of telling and hearing heroic tales of war between the gods themselves, and between the gods and the giants. One such story of this struggle between the gods is thus told by Geijer (3): "When the gods were constructing their abodes, and had already finished Midgard and Valhalla, a certain artificer came and offered to build them a residence so well fortified that they should be perfectly safe from the incursions of the Frost Giants and the Giants of the Mountains. But he demanded for his reward the Goddess Freya, together with the sun and moon. The gods yielded to the terms, provided that the artificer would finish the whole work without any one's assistance and all within the space of one winter. But if anything remained unfinished on the first day of summer, he should forfeit the recompense agreed on. On being told these terms, the artificer stipulated that he be allowed the use of his horse Svadilfari, and this request by the advice of Loki was con-

(1) Encyc. Brit., xiv, 876; xvi, 684. (2) 15, xix, 142; xvi, 684. (3) Geijer, pp. 371, 372. (is authority for the worship of Freya and Odin by the Anglo-Saxons.) "Early Man in Britain," p. 480.



ceded. He accordingly set to work on the first day of winter, and during the night let his horse draw stone for the building. The enormous size of the stones struck the gods with astonishment, and they saw clearly that the horse did one half more of the toilsome work than his master. Their bargain, however, had been concluded and confirmed by solemn oaths, for without these precautions a giant would not have thought himself safe among the gods, -- still less, indeed, if Thor should return from the expedition he had then undertaken against the evil demons.

"As the winter drew to a close, the building was far advanced; and the bulwarks were sufficiently high and massive to render the place impregnable. In short, when it wanted but three days to summer, the only part that remained to be finished was the gateway. Then sat the gods on their seats of justice, and entered into consultation, inquiring of one another who among them could have advised the rest to surrender Freya, or to plunge the heavens in darkness by permitting the giant to carry away the sun and the moon.

"They all agreed that no one but Loki, the author of so many evil deeds, could have given such counsel, and that he should be put to a cruel death unless he contrived some way to prevent the artificer from completing his task and obtaining the stipulated recompense. They proceeded to lay hands on Loki, who in his fright promised upon oath that, let it cost him what it might, he would so manage matters that the man should lose his reward. That night when the man went with Svadilfari for building-stone, a mare suddenly ran out of a forest and began to neigh. The horse thereat broke loose



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and ran after the mare into the forest, obliging the man also to run after his horse; thus, therefore, between one and another the whole night was lost, so that at dawn the work had not made the usual progress. The man, seeing that he must fail of completing his task, resumed his own gigantic stature; and the gods now clearly perceived that it was in reality a mountain giant who had come amongst them. Feeling no longer bound by their oaths, they called on Thor, who immediately ran to their assistance, and lifting up his mallet, paid the workman his wages, not with the sun and moon, and not even by sending him back to Jötunheim, for with the first blow he shattered the giant's skull to pieces, and hurled him headlong into Niflheim."

Another of these stories, told by the same writer, runs as follows:

"Once upon a time it happened that Thor's hammer fell into the possession of the giant Thrym, who buried it eight fathoms deep under the rocks of Jötunheim. Thor sent Loki to negotiate with Thrym, but he could only prevail so far as to get the giant's promise to restore the weapon if Freya would consent to be his bride. Loki returned and reported the result of his mission, but the goddess of love was horrified at the idea of bestowing her charms on the king of the Frost giants. In this emergency Loki persuaded Thor to dress himself in Freya's clothes and accompany him to Jötunheim. Thrym received his veiled bride with due courtesy, but was greatly surprised at seeing her eat for her supper eight salmon and a full-grown ox besides other delicacies, washing the whole down with three tuns of mead. Loki, however, assured



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him that she had not tasted anything for eight long nights, so great was her desire to see her lover, the renowned ruler of Jötunheim. Thrym had at last the curiosity to peep under his bride's veil, but started back in affright, and demanded why Freya's eyeballs glistened with fire. Loki repeated the same excuse, and the giant was satisfied. He ordered the hammer to be brought in and laid on the maiden's lap. Thereupon Thor threw off his disguise, grasped his redoubted weapon, and slaughtered Thrym and all his followers." (1)

Nearer home to the Anglo-Saxons was their own story of Beowulf, which relates the exploits of a great hero of supernatural proportions, against three monsters. Throughout Beowulf are scattered remnants of Teutonic saga, the myths of Scyld, Heremod, Thrytho, the story of Ingeld, Froda, and Frea-ware, the story of Sigmund, which afterward developed into the Volsunga-Saga in the North, and in Germany into the Nibelungen Lied. (2)

In Beowulf, a monster (Grendel) comes to disturb the pleasure of the meadhall in Heorot. "Every night he forces his way into the hall, seizes a number of the sleeping thegns, and bears them hence, a bloody prey, to his subterranean dwelling. Vain are the efforts to avert the terror. Thus the richly decked hall stands uninhabitable and useless. This comes to the knowledge of Beowulf. He, with fourteen chosen Geats, crosses the sea to rid Hrothgar of his enemy. He is cordially received by the king, and, in the evening, revels with him and his warriors in the hall. At night-fall the Danes forsake the hall; Beowulf and his Geats dispose themselves there to rest. Then Grendel comes stalking in. He

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(1) Gayley, p. 372. (2) Chambers, p. 5.



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beholds the slumbering heroes, and at once kills one of them. Then he tries to seize Beowulf; but the latter, stretching forth his right hand, clutches him, and the monster forthwith perceives the superhuman strength of the hero. Grendel seeks to flee, but Beowulf clasps him so firmly that, after a desperate struggle, he barely escapes with the loss of an arm, and wounded to the death. Thus is Heorot cleansed." (1) The poem as a whole consists of two other equally, if not more, heroic struggles, one with the she-monster, the mother of Grendel, and with the dragon.

Familiarity with such stories predisposed the minds of these people toward Christian stories of the great fight between good and evil. Their gods were the personification of various elements and forces observed in nature. The good god, representing spring, was overcoming and driving away the enemy god of winter, and in turn the latter overcame the former.

Though in Beowulf there is an ancient background of pagan conceptions and ideals, yet the general impression is the opposite of pagan barbarism. "The author has fairly exalted the fights with fabled monsters into a conflict between the powers of good and of evil. The figure of Grendel, at any rate, while originally an ordinary Scandinavian troll, and passing in the poem as a sort of man-monster, is at the same time conceived of as an impersonation of evil and darkness, even an incarnation of the Christian devil." (2) "That the victorious champion, who overcomes this group of monsters, is a decidedly unusual figure of very uncertain historical

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(1) Ten Brink, p. 24

(2) Klaeber, intro. to Beowulf, p. 50.



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(1) Ten Brink, p. 24.  
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associations, has been pointed out before. The poet has raised him to the rank of a singularly spotless hero, a 'defending, protecting, redeeming being', a truly ideal character. In fact, we need not hesitate to recognize features of the Christian Savior in the destroyer of hellish fiends, the warrior brave and gentle, blameless in thought and deed, the king that dies for his people. Nor is the possibility of discovering direct allusions to the person of the Savior to be ignored. While there are not lacking certain hints of this kind in the first part of the poem, it is especially in the last adventure that we are strongly tempted to look for a deeper, spiritual interpretation." (1)

Familiar to them also, no doubt, was the myth concerning Balder, in which "there is, almost undoubtedly, a touch of the Christian dawn on the figure and myth of the pure and beloved and ill-fated god Balder, and his descent into hell." (2)

Beowulf contains one reference to worship in a heathen temple. One of the means resorted to to rid themselves of Grendel and the harm he wrought was to "vow offerings in their temples of idols" with their prayers.

With the advent of Christianity the greater gods are quickly lost to sight in the literature, but still alive in the popular fancy were deities of wood and marsh, like nicors, or water-sprites (3) who left their name to our nixies and "Old Nick"; and the eotens, or giants (4). Their

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(1) Klaeber, intro. to Beowulf, p. 51.

(2) Encyc. Brit., xix, 142.

(3) Beowulf, lines 422, 575, 845, 1427.

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responsiveness to nature caused them to worship the heavenly bodies, rocks, running streams, and green trees. The national heroes were deified. "As these (the deeds of heroes) receded into the past, a hero soon came to be pictured as greater and stronger, his deeds as more wonderful, a battle or war as fiercer or longer, than they had actually been. Supernatural attributes, even, might be added to a hero. Stories of different heroes might after a time be run together, or even stories of a hero and of a god, as seems to have been the case with Beowulf." (1)

That they looked beyond these things, however, and had a much higher idea of God seems to be attested by the language itself, for in Anglo-Saxon the name of God signifies good (2). Woden was called the Alfadur (All-father)(3), and was regarded as kindly disposed toward the children of men. Therefore, when the Christian missionaries came preaching such a God, they found the minds of the Anglo-Saxon race prepared for his reception.

Wyrd, or Fate, lingered long as a dominating idea in their superstition. "Wyrd goeth ever as she must," declared Beowulf (4) when talking about the yet uncertain outcome of his encounter with the monster Grendel. "But no longer was it Fate's decree that he might, after that night, feed on more of the race of men." (5) The theme of the poem called The Wanderer is the cruelty of Fate (6).

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(1) Child, intro. to translation of Beowulf, p. vii.

(2) Turner and Palgrave both give this interpretation.

(3) Gayley, 368.

(4) Beowulf, 455.

(5) id., 734.

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The following lines are from The Ruined City:

"High rose its wealth  
Of horned pinnacles, while loud within  
Was heard the joyous revelry of men --  
Till mighty Fate came with her sudden change!" (1)

In part II of The Seafarer, which is obviously Christian, Fate is linked with the the Creator: "Fate, God the Creator, is stronger than any man's will." (2) In Beowulf, God is said to control Fate (3).

In Beowulf there are several references to Hel, or Hela, the daughter of Loki and the goddess who presided over the place of the dead (4). She is also mentioned in the Voluspa of Norse mythology. Thus we have a connection between the Anglo-Saxon religion and the religion common to the northern nations of Europe. And the Anglo-Saxon name for earth, "middan-geard," or middle yard, affords another connecting link between Anglo-Saxon and Norse mythology, for this term is common to both.

Valuable because of the light they throw on the primitive superstitions of the Anglo-Saxons are the Charms, some of which were supposed to bring to pass miraculous things. Although modified by Christianity, they represent a form and spirit of a remote heathenism. The literary type of the charms is found also in Danish and German and other languages (5). This makes another connection between Anglo-Saxon religious belief and points toward its origin in the common religion of the Teutonic peoples. "An old German charm presents Wodan as wiser than the other gods in the ways of magic healing.

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(1) Cook & Tinker, Old English Poetry, p. 57 (lines 22-25)

(2) id., p. 49 (line 111)

(3) Beowulf, 1056.

(4) id., 101, 179, 588, 788, 852, 1274.

(5) Thomas, p. 15.



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(2) Id., p. 49 (line 111)  
(3) Beowulf, 1036.  
(4) Id., 101, 178, 288, 289, 292, 1374.  
(5) Thomas, p. 15.



As he is riding through the woods with certain other divinities, a horse's leg is sprained. The others 'bespeak' the injury in vain, but Wodan, who 'well knew how,' effects a cure." (1)

The Charms, handed down as they were among the common people, were very persistently rooted in the life and thought, so much so that even the church did not uproot them; but they were readily taken over and baptized by a Christianity tinged with superstitions very similar. Where we find in them the name of Christ or of a saint probably there was originally the name of Woden or Thor or some other Teutonic divinity.

The Anglo-Saxon Charms exist as a dozen or so short poems or verse incantations, with directions for their use on certain occasions. The following lines are from the Charm for Bewitched Land (2):

"Here is a remedy with which thou canst improve thy fields if they will not bring forth, or if any evil thing is done to them through sorcery or witchcraft."

The procedure is described in detail, and then comes the incantation, of which the following are a few of the lines:

"Erce, Erce, Erce, mother of earth,"

and a little further on is this appeal to the earth itself:

"Well be it with thee, Earth the mother of men!  
Fruitful mayest thou be in the embrace of God,  
Filled with food for the service of men."

"The conception of earth as being made fruitful in the embrace of the god is thoroughly pagan, and illustrates the way in which the Charms reflect old popular superstitions." (3)

(1) Thomas, p. 5.

(2) Cook & Tinker, O. E. Poetry, pp. 164-167.

(3) Crawshaw, p. 5.



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"Hroce, Hroce, Hroce, mother of earth,"

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Some of the verses in the Charms speak of female beings (Norse valkyries, probably) which ride through the air, from whose shafts protection is secured through that particular charm. Still other charms have to do with the swarming of bees; a sudden stitch; the nine-herbs which "are strong against nine cursed things, against nine venoms and against nine infections," and the list is given: "against the red venom, against the gray venom, against the white venom, against the blue venom, against the yellow venom, against the green venom, against the black venom, against the brown venom, against the purple venom; against snake-blister, against water-blister, against thorn-blister, against thistle-blister, against ice-blister, against poison-blister; if any venom come flying from the east, or if any come from the north, or any from the west over the people. Christ stood over venom of every kind. I alone know running water, and the nine serpents behold it. All grasses may spring up with herbs, the sea vanish away, all the salt water, when I blow this venom from thee." (1)

Another Charm is for the regaining of lost cattle: "As soon as one says that thy cattle are lost, say first before thou say anything else:

"Bethlehem was named the town where Christ was born;  
It is renowned through all the world;  
So may this deed become famed among men  
Through the Holy Rood of Christ. Amen.

"Then pray thrice toward the east, and say thrice: *Crux Christi ab oriente reducat.*" And the same formula is repeated toward the other three directions. The influence

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Another Charm is for the regaining of lost cattle: "As soon as one says that thy cattle are lost, my first be- fore thou say anything else:

"Hathin was named the town where Christ was born;  
It is renowned through all the world;  
So may this deed become famed among men  
Through the Holy Rood of Christ. Amen.

"Then pray thrice toward the east, and say thrice:  
Cross Christ as oriente redent." And the same formula is repeated toward the other three directions. The influence



of Christianity is plainly seen in this last charm, while in the Nine-Herbs Charm it seems to be tacked on as a mere addition.

Another charm had to do with weapons, and is referred to in Beowulf (1): "None of battle-bills could touch that fell spoiler, for he had laid his spell on weapons of victory, on every keen edge." And the she-demon, Grendel's mother, could not be wounded by any weapon except her own (2). The Christian counterpart of these Charms is to be found in the various miracle-working relics, of which more will be said in the second part of this essay.

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(1) Beowulf, line 804.

(2) id., 1529, 1557.







#### 4. The Acceptance of Christianity by the Anglo-Saxons.---

For about a century and a half the English practiced their old religion in their new home, although Christianity had been known in Britain previous to their coming. Christianity came to Britain during the third century, or possibly, as some think, earlier, from Gaul. Bede tells of the death of a martyr St. Alban between the years 286 and 303. That a British church existed in the fourth century is attested by the fact that bishops of London, York, and Lincoln attended the council of Arles in 314. Britons made pilgrimages to Rome and to Palestine, and some joined the monks who gathered round St. Martin, bishop of Tours. They were a zealous missionary people. St. Patrick went from Britain as the apostle to Ireland about 432, where he labored with great success.

The Saxon invasion cut off the Britons from Rome, although this does not seem to have been the real cause of their lapse back to paganism. During the half century prior to the coming of the Saxons Christianity had been losing its hold on the British, so that in 447, the date given by Bede, just two years before the coming of the Saxons, it was finally abandoned. Bede counts as one of their worst sins their neglect to preach the Christian faith to the Saxons, or English, who dwelt among them. (1)

Consequently, the English did not learn of Christianity until it was again brought to their island from the outside. A singular thing happened. Britain was reevangelized by the Irish, the converts of her own missionaries of a century or

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more earlier. St. Columba came from Ireland about 563 and founded a monastery on the island of Iona, from which the gospel teaching spread through Scotland and later came to the Teutonic conquerors of Britain, first in Northumbria. St. Columba died in 597, the year that Augustine landed in Britain.

The Irish had an important literary as well as religious influence. It is to them that we owe the development of the vernacular literature in Northumbria. The Roman missionaries, lead by Augustine, fostered the development of a Latin literature in England, but the Irish missionaries, who had a considerable literature in their native tongue, encouraged the English literary impulse to find expression in the native Anglo-Saxon language. Of the important influence of the Irish on English poetry, Brooke says: "During this time (seventy years beginning in 635) the Irish character, the passion, impulsiveness and tenderness of Columba; some at least of the Irish poetry, with its elements of colour, romance, invention, and charm, penetrated the Northumbrians, and we can scarcely avoid thinking that this was one of the causes which made Northumbria more creative of poetry than the rest of England, especially when we remember that the Celtic impulse came to the English charged with all the new emotions of Christianity." (1)

In 597 Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory from Rome to evangelize the English. The story of Gregory's purpose to send the gospel to England is very familiar, but is worthy of being quoted here somewhat at length as a specimen of early

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English thought and expression. Bede thus recounts the story:

"Nor is the account of St. Gregory which has been handed down to us by the tradition of our ancestors to be passed by in silence, in relation to his motives for taking such interest in the salvation of our nation. It is reported that some merchants, having just arrived at Rome on a certain day (between 585 and 588 A. D.), exposed many things for sale in the market place, and abundance of people resorted thither to buy. Gregory himself went with the rest, and, among other things, some boys were set to sale, their bodies white, their countenances comely, and their hair of remarkable beauty. Having viewed them, he asked, as is said, from what country or nation they were brought, and was told, from the island of Britain, whose inhabitants were of such personal appearance.(1) He again inquired whether those islanders were Christians, or still involved in the errors of heathendom; and was informed that they were heathens. Then fetching a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart, 'Alas! what a pity,' said he, 'that the author of darkness should possess men of such fair countenances, and that, being remarkable for such grace of exterior, their minds should be void of inward grace! ' He therefore again asked what was the name of that nation, and was informed that they were called Angles. 'Right,' said he, 'for they have an angelic face, and it becomes such to be coheirs with the angels of heaven. What is the name,' preceeded he, 'of the province from which they are brought?' It was replied that that province was called Deira. 'Truly they are De ira,' said he, 'snatched from the wrath of God, and called to the mercy of Christ.

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(1) See Wordsworth, Eccl. Sonnets 13.



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(1) See Northcote, Eccl. Sonnets 12.



"Then repairing to the bishop of the Roman and apostolic see -- for he was not yet himself made pope -- he entreated him to send some ministers of the word into Britain to the nation of the English, by whom it might be converted to Christ; declaring himself ready to undertake that work, by the assistance of God, if the apostolic pope should think fit to have it so done. Which not being then able to perform, . . . as soon as he was himself made pope, he carried out the long-desired work, sending indeed others as preachers, but himself by his prayers and exhortations assisting the preaching, that it might be successful." (1)

Of the actual coming of Augustine to fulfil Gregory's cherished purpose, we read in Bede's History:

"He (Gregory), being moved by divine inspiration, in the fourteenth year of the same emperor (Maurice, i.e., in 597), and about the one hundred and fiftieth after the coming of the English into Britain, sent the servant of God, Augustine, and with him several other monks who feared the Lord, to preach the word of God to the English nation." . . .

"In this island (Thanet) landed the servant of our Lord, Augustine, and his companions, being, as is reported, nearly forty men.

"They had, by order of the blessed Pope Gregory, taken interpreters of the nation of the Franks, and sending to Aethelbert, signified that they were come from Rome and brought a joyful message. . . The king having heard this, ordered that they should remain in the island where they had

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(1) Eccl. Hist., ii, 1; Aelfric's Homily on St. Gregory the Great relates the same story, the A. S. text of which is given in Bright's A. S. Reader, pp. 86 ff.



"Then replying to the bishop of the Roman and apostolic see -- for he was not yet himself made pope -- he addressed him to send some ministers of the word into Britain to the nation of the English, by whom it might be converted to Christ; declaring himself ready to undertake that work, by the assistance of God, if the apostolic pope should think fit to have it so done. Which not being then able to perform, . . . as soon as he was himself made pope, he carried out the long-desired work, sending indeed others as preachers, but himself by his prayers and exhortations assisting the preaching, that it might be successful." (1)

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"In this island (Thames) landed the servant of our Lord, Augustine, and his companions, being, as is reported, nearly forty men.

"They had, by order of the blessed Pope Gregory, taken interpreters of the nation of the Franks, and sending to Aethelbert, signified that they were come from Rome and brought a joyful message. . . . The king having heard this, ordered that they should remain in the island where they had

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landed, and that they should be furnished with all necessaries, till he should consider what to do with them. . . .

"Some days after, the king came into the island, and sitting in the open air, ordered Augustine and his companions to be brought into his presence. For he had taken precaution that they should not come to him in any house, lest, according to an ancient superstition, if they practised any magical arts, they might impose upon him, and so get the better of him. But they came furnished with divine, not with diabolic virtue, bearing a silver cross for their banner (1), and the image of our Lord and Saviour painted on a board; and, singing litanies, they offered up their prayers to the Lord for the eternal salvation of themselves and of those to whom they were come. When they were sat down, . . . the king answered thus: 'Your words and promises are very fair, but as they are new to us and of uncertain import, I cannot approve of them so far as to forsake that which I have so long followed with the whole English Nation.'" (2)

The king permitted them to remain and preach, and assigned them a residence in Canterbury. By the end of the year Augustine had baptized 10,000 converts among the people of Kent (3), and within less than a century the conversion of England to Christianity was practically complete, due to the combined efforts of Irish missionaries in the North and the labors of Augustine and his successors in the South.

That the English seemed to feel their need of something new and better seems evident from the manner in which

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(1) See Wordsworth, Eccl. sonnets 14.

(2) Eccl. Hist., i, 23, 25.

(3) Encyc. Brit. ix, 443.







they received the representatives of the new religion. Gregory's vision for the English nation was fulfilled. He regarded it as God's "chosen nation" (1), and he must have seen this by "divine inspiration," for "Christianity never made an easier conquest, and the ideals of a converted people never underwent a more complete metamorphosis. It was indeed a displacement of the original centre of gravity when saints and martyrs eclipsed warriors in the popular veneration, and traditions of Teutons gave way to the traditions of Hebrews, Greeks, and Latins. The natural development of Anglo-Saxon literature was destroyed, and every prognostic concerning it which might have seemed reasonable a century earlier was brought to nought." (2)

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(1) Bede, *Ecccl. Hist.*, i, 31.

(2) Garnett & Gosse, *Vol. I*, p. 4.

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5. The Birth of Anglo-Saxon Christian Literature.--The story of the birth of Christian literature among the English is thus related by Bede (1):

"There was in the monastery of this abbess a certain brother especially distinguished by the grace of God, since he was wont to make poems breathing of piety and religion. Whatever he learned of sacred Scripture by the mouth of interpreters, he in a little time gave forth in poetical language composed with the greatest sweetness and depth of feeling, in English, his native tongue; and the effect of his poems was ever and anon to incite the souls of many to despise the world and long for the heavenly life. Not but that there were others after him among the people of the Angles who sought to compose religious poetry; but none there was who could equal him, for he did not learn the art of song from men, nor through the means of any man; rather did he receive it as a free gift from God. Hence it came to pass that he never was able to compose poetry of a frivolous or idle sort; none but such as pertain to religion suited a tongue so religious as his. Living always the life of a layman until well advanced in years, he had never learned the least thing about poetry. In fact, so little did he understand of it that when at a feast it would be ruled that every one present should, for the entertainment of the others, sing in turn, he would, as soon as he saw the harp coming anywhere near him, jump up from the table in the midst of the banqueting, leave the place, and make the best of his way home.

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(1) Bede, Eccl. Hist., iv, 24; from Albert S. Cook's trans. in Cook & Tinker, Translations from O. E. Prose, pp. 54 ff.



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"There was in the monastery of this abbey a certain brother especially distinguished by the grace of God, since he was wont to make poems presiding of piety and religion. Whatever he learned of sacred Scripture by the mouth of interpreters, he in a little time gave forth in poetical language composed with the greatest sweetness and depth of feeling, in English, his native tongue; and the effect of his poems was ever and anon to invite the souls of many to de-  
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(1) Bede, *Eccl. Hist.*, iv, 24; from Albert S. Cook's trans. in Cook & Tinker, *Translations from O. E. Prose*, pp. 24 ff.



"This he had done at a certain time, and leaving the house where the feast was in progress, had gone out to the stable where the care of the cattle had been assigned to him for that night. There, when it was time to go to sleep, he had lain down for that purpose. But while he slept some one stood by him in a dream, greeted him, called him by name, and said, 'Caedmon, sing me something.' To this he replied, 'I know not how to sing, and that is the very reason why I left the feast and came here, because I could not sing.' But the one who was talking with him answered, 'No matter, you are to sing for me.' 'Well, then,' said he, 'what is it that I must sing?' 'Sing,' said the other, the beginning of created things.' At this reply he immediately began to sing verses in praise of God the Creator, verses that he had never heard, and whose meaning is as follows: 'Now should we praise the Keeper of the heavenly kingdom, the might of the Creator and His counsel, the works of the Father of glory; how He, though God eternal, became the Author of all marvels. He, the almighty Guardian of mankind, first created for the sons of men heaven as a roof, and afterwards the earth.' This is the meaning, but not the precise order, of the words which he sang in his sleep; for no songs, however well they may be composed, can be rendered from one language into another without loss of grace and dignity. (1) When he rose from sleep, he remembered all that he had sung while in that state, and shortly after added, in the same strain, many more words of a hymn befitting the majesty of God.

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(1) Ten Brink, p. 39, footnote, gives the Northumbrian original of Caedmon's Hymn; and in the appendix, pp. 371ff, comments on the authenticity of the verses.







"In the morning he went to the steward who was set over him, and showed him what gift he had acquired. Being led to the abbess, he was bidden to make known his dream and repeat his poem to the many learned men who were present, that they all might give their judgment concerning the thing which he related, and whence it was; and they were unanimously of the opinion that heavenly grace had been bestowed upon him by the Lord. They then set about expounding to him a piece of sacred history or teaching, bidding him, if he could, to turn it into the rhythm of poetry. This he undertook to do, and departed. In the morning he returned and delivered the passage assigned to him, converted into an excellent poem. The abbess, honoring the grace of God as displayed in the man, shortly afterward instructed him to forsake the condition of a layman and take upon himself the vows of a monk. She thereupon received him into the monastery with his whole family, and made him one of the company of the brethren, commanding that he should be taught the whole course and succession of Biblical history. He, in turn, calling to mind what he was able to learn by the hearing of the ear, and, as it were, like a clean animal, chewing upon it as a cud (1) transformed it all into most agreeable poetry; and, by echoing it back in a more harmonious form, made his teachers in turn listen to him. Thus he rehearsed the creation of the world, the origin of man, and all the story of Genesis; the departure of Israel from Egypt and their entry into the promised land, together with many other histories from Holy Writ; the incarnation of our Lord, His passion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven;

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the coming of the Holy Ghost and the teaching of the apostles; moreover he made many poems about the terror of the future judgment, the awfulness of the pains of hell, and the joy of the heavenly kingdom, besides a great number about the mercies and judgments of God. In all these he exerted himself to allure men from the love of wickedness, and to impel them to the love and practice of righteous living; for he was a very devout man, humbly submissive to the monastic rule, but full of consuming zeal against those who were disposed to act otherwise."

This account of the poet Caedmon is characteristic of the age in which both Caedmon and Bede lived. The age abounded in stories of miracles, and it is not unusual that the inspiration of the first English Christian poet should have been miraculously explained.

The thoroughly Christian tone of both Caedmon and Bede is all the more remarkable when we remember that Caedmon sang and Bede was born less than a century after the coming of Augustine. There is only one other name from this early Christian period that we know with certainty, Cynewulf. His work was done in the century following Caedmon, that is, in the latter half of the eighth century. That there were other writers seems certain, for the research of scholars has caused them to be generally agreed that not all of the works formerly ascribed to Caedmon and Cynewulf are theirs solely (1). This is significant, for it indicates that these were not isolated literary lights, but that many other lamps were lighted by the new fire.

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(1) Camb. Hist. of Eng. Liter., I, 50.



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(1) Camp. Hist. of Eng. Liter., I, 30.



What the future of English literature would have been without this new motive supplied by Christianity it is impossible to say. At any rate, the reestablishment of Christianity in Britain was the beginning of a new epoch in English life and literature. It seems that the infusion of new life came at just the right time to combine with the old life, and that the combination was necessary in order that the English literary spirit might have the needed materials to reach its best development.

The characteristic of the old verse was its sombre grimness, and its picture of a life of constant struggle, either with human foes or with nature in its sterner aspects, overshadowed by the approach of inevitable destiny.

But the tone was modified by the introduction of the gentler spirit of Christianity. The poetry written under the new influence exhibits a more cheerful view of life. So strong was the influence of Christianity that within a century the tide was turned forever into new channels. The mythical war of Day and Night, of Summer and Winter, of the Sun against the Frost and Mist, now became the war between Christ and Satan, between spiritual Light and Darkness, between the Church and Heathenism, between the Saint and the Tempter, between God and the old Dragon; but the original spirit of the myth is preserved. Hero tales of patriarchs and apostles, saints and martyrs, entirely eclipsed the stirring tales formerly sung of Woden and Thor, of Beowulf and Finnsburg, but the old delight and excitement in the 'goodly fight' is still easily discoverable. "The same hall in which



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today Beowulf's fight with Grendel or the attack at Finnsburg were sung, might resound on the morrow with songs celebrating the six days' work of creation, and taking the place of the pagan cosmogonic hymns. The transition to the new materials was doubtless easy for the glee-men. Epithets of the gods and heroes could often, without change, or with only slight modification, serve for the God of the Christians, or for the patriarchs and saints. God himself, in his relation to angels and men, was conceived as the almighty prince, as the beloved chieftain; the devil, as the faithless vassal who antagonises his gold-friend; the heavenly throne was the gift-stool of the spirits. In like manner the relation of Christ to his apostles and disciples took form in the popular conception." (1)

Though the subject matter was changed, it was impossible for the literary genius and impulse to be so abruptly changed. The two currents ran together to make a larger river; their intermingling was gradual, until finally they became one current.

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(1) Ten Brink, 37, 38.



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## II. SUPERNATURALISM IN THE EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE

In works on early English literature practically all of the authors show in detail the Christian treatment of war, of the sea, and of nature, with an occasional reference to the supernatural. But of equal value in forming an idea of the mind and thought of the age is an examination of the legendary lore of the pre-Christian and early Christian period in which the supernatural element is prominent. This paper is not intended to discredit the fact of miracles, but merely to convey an idea of the extent to which they figured in the thought and literature of the English people of that age.

The minds of the people had been accustomed to dwell upon supernatural deeds done by gods and heroes. It was only natural, therefore, that those things brought to them by the Christian religion which were similar in nature should be taken up by them and made a conspicuous theme in their literature; and it was easy for the Christianity of that time to gratify the popular taste. During the first three or four centuries of the Christian era there sprang up innumerable legends concerning Christ, the apostles, saints, martyrs, and the cross. Many of these found ready acceptance in England, as ready substitutes for the older folk-lore, and furnished the basis for stirring religious epics. Though the literature is predominantly Christian in subject matter, yet we shall see that it shows evidences of the older, or pagan, ways of thinking.



## II. SUPERNATURALISM IN THE EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE

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1. Saints' Legends (a) from Foreign Sources.--An excellent example is Andreas, or the Legend of St. Andrew. The source is found in the Acts of Andrew and Matthew, a legend extant in both Greek and Latin (1). Although the poet has borrowed his story from a foreign source, "he has added and altered until he has made it thoroughly his own and thoroughly English. We can learn from it the tastes and ideals of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers quite as well as from a poem wholly original in its composition. Most clearly do we discover their love of the sea. The action of the story begins in a voyage, which the Greek narrative dismisses with a few words, merely as a piece of necessary machinery. The Old English poem, on the contrary, expands the incident into many lines." (2) The poem begins like Beowulf, in the strain of the hero epic:

"Lo! we have learned of Twelve in days gone by,  
Who dwelt beneath the stars, in glory rich,  
Thanes of the Lord, whose courage for the fight  
Failed never." (3)

Compare with this the opening of Beowulf: "Lo! we have heard tell of the might in days of old of the Spear-Danes' folk-kings, how deeds of prowess were wrought by the athelings." (4) The Andreas illustrates "in an unusual degree, the blending of the old spirit with the new. St. Andrew, though professedly a Christian saint, is, in reality, a viking; though crusader in name, he is more truly a seafarer on adventure bent. The Christ he serves is an aetheling, the apostles are folctogan--captains of the people--and temporal victory, not merely spiritual triumph, is the goal." (5) Throughout the poem Andrew

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- (1) For a translation of this, in part, with the Greek original, see Cook's First Book in O.E., App. III, p. 247.  
 (2) Root, introduction to his translation of Andreas, p. vi.  
 (3) Andreas, lines 1-4.  
 (4) Beowulf, " 1-3.  
 (5) Camb. Hist., p. 60.



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is the "valiant," "brave," or "mighty" saint; the "hero," the "glorious thane," as well as the "noble King's apostle," and the "saint beloved." Thus side by side are used terms found in Beowulf and those learned from the Gospels. The miraculous elements have much curious interest. The outline of the story is as follows:

It has fallen to the lot of Matthew to preach the Gospel to the cannibal Mermedonians; they seize him and his company, binding him and casting him into prison, where he is to remain until his turn comes to be eaten. He prays to God for help, who sends to him in his dark cell

"A sacred sign all-glorious from heaven,  
Like to the shining sun." (Lines 89, 90)

God comforts Matthew and promises to send him help. He then appears to Andrew and instructs him to go and rescue Matthew. Andrew hesitates because of the dangers and difficulties of the undertaking, but is reassured and encouraged.

Not knowing how he will make the sea-passage, Andrew and his disciples come to the sea-shore. They find a bark with three seamen, who are in reality the Lord and His two angels. On learning that Andrew is a follower of Jesus, the shipmaster agrees to carry him to Mermedonia. A storm arises, at which the disciples of Andrew are greatly terrified; he reminds them how Christ stilled the tempest, and they fall asleep. Then follows a long dialog, which is the only break in the steady movement of the story, and in which Andrew relates to the shipmaster many of Christ's miracles.

Andrew falls asleep, and here a new miracle is introduced into the story. The ordinary travel, even by this ship miraculously provided for Andrew is too slow, and so



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"The Lord of life then bade His angels bear  
That saint beloved over the beating waves,  
And gently carry him upon their breasts  
Under the Father's care across the floods,  
While sleep was on him weary of the sea.  
So journeying through the air he reached the land  
And came unto the city, which the King  
Of angels bade him seek." (Lines 822-9)

On awakening, he beholds the city, and his disciples sleeping beside him. The Lord appears and bids him enter the city, covering him with a cloud. He reaches the prison, the doors of which fly open at his touch (1). He rescues Matthew, whom he sends away with all his company and 248 other prisoners. God covers them with a cloud so that they make their escape.

One naturally wonders why Andrew does not join the company and depart to safety, but from the further reading of the tale we learn that he has a mission still to fulfil there in the conversion of the Mermedonians, which is accomplished by a series of unusual wonders and miracles. He is a Beowulf who stays to contend with a Grendel or a great dragon.

The Mermedonians, confronted with a famine now that all of their prisoners had escaped, choose one of their number by lot to serve as food for the rest. He offers his son as a substitute, but as the heathen are about to slay their victim, Andrew interposes and causes their weapons to melt away like wax. This naturally angers the people of the place against him. Instigated by the devil, they seize Andrew, and for three days they subject him to most cruel punishments. On the fourth day the Lord comes to his prison and heals him of his wounds. Beside the prison wall Andrew sees a marble pillar,

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(1) Here is a borrowing from Beowulf, as pointed out in Root, intro. page x. The door of Heorot in Beowulf opens similarly at Grendel's touch. Beowulf, 721. This is departure from the original Greek legend, where it is stated that Andrew made the sign of the cross on the door and it opened.



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which at his command, sends forth from its base (1) a great flood, destroying many of the people.

"Give ear, thou marble stone, to God's command. . .  
Let streams well forth from out thy firm support,  
A gushing river. . . .

Then was there no delay; straightway the stone  
Split open, and a stream came rushing out  
And flowed along the ground; at early dawn  
The foaming billows covered up the earth;  
. . . . They fain would save their lives  
And seek a refuge in the mountain caves,  
Firm earth's support. An angel drove them back,  
Compassing all the town with gleaming fire,  
With savage flames. Wild beat the sea within;  
No troop of men could scape from out the walls.  
The waves waxed, and the waters thundered loud;  
The firebrands flew; the flood welled up in streams."  
(Lines 1497 ff)

The punishment has the desired effect, for

"Straightway began  
One wretched warrior to collect the folk;  
Humble and sad, he spake with mournful voice:--  
'Now may ye truly know that we did wrong  
When we o'erwhelmed this stranger with our chains,  
With bonds of torment, in the prison-house;  
For Fate is crushing us, most fierce and stern--  
That is full clear!---And better is it far,  
So hold I truth, that we with one accord  
Should loose him soon as may be from his bonds,  
And beg the holy man to give us help,  
Comfort and aid! Full quickly we shall find  
Peace after sorrow, if we seek of him.'"  
(Lines 1555 ff)

Andrew takes pity on them and causes the flood to cease. The mountain is cleft and swallows up the waters, together with fourteen of the "worst caitiffs of the throng." The rest are brought back to life and receive baptism.

"He bade the youths, those whom the flood had slain,  
Rise up unscathed in body from the ground.  
Then straightway stood there up among the throng  
Many an ungrown child, as I have heard;  
Body and soul were joined again in one,  
Though but a short time gone in flood's fierce rush  
They all had lost their lives." (Lines 1622 ff)

(1) The Prose Legend of St. Andrew has the water coming from the mouth of an image mounted on a pillar in the middle of the prison. (See Bright's A. S. Reader, p. 125, lines 14 ff) The idea of



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After building a church and appointing a bishop, Andrew returns to Achaia, followed by the prayers of his new converts.

The didactic note occasionally sounds, as in lines 1150-54:

"To God, the Lord of lords,  
Be thanks for all, because He giveth might  
To every man who wisely seeketh aid  
From Him on high! There is eternal peace  
Ever prepared for those who can attain."

These poems were meant not merely to thrill and entertain the hearers, but to teach them to place their trust in God, and to inspire their confidence in one who could do even greater deeds than their heroes and gods of old.

In the poem Elene we have another fine example of the English genius at work on a foreign subject. With free play of the imagination, and in the heroic style of the epic, the author has created one of the best of early English poems. It recounts the legend of the expedition of the Empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, to Palestine in search of the true cross, and its miraculously successful issue.

The cross was a favorite subject, not only in England but also in the rest of Christian Europe. The original legend is found in the Latin Acta Sanctorum. Aelfric cites Jerome as an authority for the legend. (1) In his Homily on The Invention of the Holy Cross, Aelfric tells the story thus, in part:

"In great anxiety the Emperor set forth with an army, looking often toward heaven, and earnestly imploring divine

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(1) Aelfric, Hom. 2. 302-6; in Cook & Tinker, Prose, p. 175.







aid. Then in a dream he saw in the resplendent east, gloriously shining, the sign of the Lord's cross, and angels, whom he saw, said to him: 'Emperor Constantine, with this sign do thou overcome thine enemies.' Then he awoke, rejoicing because of the vision and the promised victory, and he marked on his head and on his standard the holy sign of the cross, to the honor of God. . . .

"His mother was a Christian, Helena by name, a true believer and extremely devout. With perfect faith she went to Jerusalem, seeking to find the cross upon which Christ had suffered. She went to the place which God had indicated by means of a heavenly sign, and found three crosses, one being that of Jesus, and the others those of the thieves. However, she did not know which was the cross of Christ, until He revealed it by signs. Then the queen rejoiced greatly that she was permitted to find this treasure in the earth, and through signs to recognize it. On the place of execution, where the cross lay, she erected a church to the dear Lord; and she enclosed a part of the cross in white silver, taking the rest of it, together with the iron nails which had been driven through Christ's hands when he was made fast, to her son."

The more detailed story in the poem is as follows: The Emperor Constantine, being threatened by hosts of Huns, is comforted in a dream, and sees his famous vision of a bright cross in the sky, with inscribed letters, telling him that in this sign he should conquer. After his return from victory he inquires which of the gods it is to whom that sign belongs, and, being taught by the Christians in his empire, himself receives baptism. He then sends, with a stately company, his



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mother Helena to the Holy Land to discover the true cross itself.

Helena arrives at Jerusalem and inquires of the assembled Jews, who take counsel together. They put forward a wise man, Judas, who might be able to tell her what they themselves do not know. Threat of death obtains from Judas only the profession of his ignorance upon this matter which took place so long ago (233 years). Seven days' imprisonment without food obliges Judas to contrive a plan. Not knowing where the cross had been buried, he leads the way to the top of Calvary, and prays that a "winsome smoke" might rise from the ground over the cross. Here occurs the first notable miracle:

"Then out of that place a vapor arose  
Like smoke 'neath the heavens." (Lines 803-4)

Judas digs twenty feet deep and finds three crosses. He takes these to the queen, who asks which of the three is the cross of Christ. Judas does not know, but has all of the crosses set up and waits for a sign. A dead man is brought. Judas places the corpse against two of the crosses, but nothing happens. But --

"Then was the third  
Holy upraised. The body awaited  
Until over it the Aetheling's (cross),  
His rood, was upraised, Heaven-king's tree,  
True token of victory. Soon he arose  
Ready in spirit, both together  
Body and soul. There praise was uplifted  
Fair 'mid the folk. The Father they honored,  
And also the true Son of the Ruler  
They praised in words. Be glory and thanks  
To him without end from all his creatures."  
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home, but is sent again by Constantine to build a church on Calvary. Judas is baptized and given a new name, Cyriacus.

Helena conceives the new thought of recovering the nails of the cross, now that she has the cross itself. Another miracle occurs, leading to the discovery of the nails.

"Then caused he the token, where they were looking,  
The father, hope's Spirit, in form of fire  
Upwards to rise, where they most noble  
By means of men had once been hidden  
With secret cunning, the nails in the earth.  
Then suddenly came brighter than the sun  
The playing flame. The people saw  
To the giver of their will the wonder made known,  
When there out of darkness, like stars of heaven,  
Or gems of gold, upon the bottom  
The nails from the narrow bed shining beneath  
Brilliantly glittered." (Lines 1105 ff)

The nails are made by Helena into a bit for Constantine's horse; thenceforth, the Emperor, with this charm, is invincible in battle.

Helena devotes her life to religious acts. Cyriacus becomes a priest at Jerusalem; Helena admonishes all to obey him, and then returns home.

The story of Elene and the finding of the true cross stands chief among numerous other poems on the same subject; e.g., The Christ of Cynewulf and the Dream of the Rood, to be referred to later in this study.

The Legend of Juliana is another example of this kind. Its source is the Acta Sanctorum, and at least eleven Latin manuscripts exist containing the story (1). It is one of the signed poems of Cynewulf. The Anglo-Saxon poem does not agree exactly with any of the Latin versions, but Cynewulf simply selected such portions as he desired to use. This syn-

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(1) Kennedy, in the preface to his translation of Juliana.







opsis is from the Anglo-Saxon:

The legend recounts the heroic steadfastness of a Christian maiden of the city of Nicomedia, who refused to give up her faith in order to marry the heathen prefect of the place. She refused to sacrifice to Diana, and was accordingly subjected to the worst humiliation and torture that the heathen could devise, and was finally thrown into prison.

In part II, the captain of Hell, the enemy of mankind, skilled in evil, appeared in the form of an angel to Juliana in the prison. In this guise he tempts her to yield and avert the tortures prepared for her. In answer to her supplications, a voice from the clouds tells Juliana to "seize this vile one and hold him fast, till that he rightly declare unto thee his purpose, even from the beginning what his kinship may be." Juliana then forces from the devil the confession of his evil purpose in coming to her. The devil is quite under her power. She presses him still further, so that he admits a whole list of other wicked things done by himself and the other inhabitants of hell. She finally releases him, and he returns to seek his home in the abyss of darkness, and here is a little touch of humor, whether so intended or not: "And he, the announcer of evil, was wiser than to tell his fellows, the ministers of torment, how it befell him upon his journey."

Juliana is next brought from the prison. The prefect orders her to be dragged on a wheel to which are attached sharp swords. She is horribly cut, but remains steadfast. Next he orders her to be burned alive, but "then came an angel of God, gleaming with adornments, and pushed aside the fire and freed and protected her who was pure of wrong and guilt-







less, and cast aside the devouring flame where the holy maid, princess of women, stood unharmed in the midst." (1)

The heathen prince is stirred with greater anger to see his purposes thus frustrated before the eyes of all the spectators, and he orders a great vessel full of molten lead to be prepared. Into the vessel boiling with the heat he orders Juliana to be cast. She is miraculously preserved, but seventy-five heathen are burned by the lead which poured forth in a stream upon them.

Still more infuriated, like a beast snarling and gnashing its teeth, the prefect blasphemes his own gods because they "with all their power might not withstand the will of a woman." He then orders her to be beheaded with the sword. Then was "the heart of the maiden greatly cheered, when she heard men declare their hateful counsel that at last the end of her days of strife should come and her life be set free." Before her death, Juliana exhorts the company to turn to God. Her death immediately follows.

Her persecutor, Eleusius, becomes much affrighted at what he has done and puts to sea with a band of his warriors. With thirty-four of them he perishes in the sea, and they "deprived of joy and hopeless, sought out Hell." (1) Thus his miserable end is contrasted with Juliana's "eternal joy."

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(1)

Quotations are from Kennedy's translation of Juliana.







1. Saints' Legends (b) from English Sources.--Besides the supernatural stories borrowed from outside sources, there was a vast number connected with the development of Christianity on English soil. They are so numerous in Bede as to be a prominent characteristic of his works.

Although Bede's writings were originally in Latin, they are thoroughly English in spirit. They were translated into Anglo-Saxon by the time of Alfred, at the latest, and possibly by Alfred himself, and, as translations, are among the earliest English prose writings. They are a curious combination of scholarship and credulity. "Side by side with this historical exactness are marvelous stories of saints and missionaries. It was an age of credulity, and miracles were in men's minds continually. The men of whom he wrote lived lives more wonderful than any romance, and their courage and gentleness made a tremendous impression on the rough, warlike people to whom they came with open hands and hearts. .... Bede believed these things, as all other men did, and records them with charming simplicity, just as he received them from bishop or abbot." (1)

Many of the miraculous stories told by Bede have nothing necessarily miraculous about them. One, for example, is recorded of Cuthbert, who, while a boy, had a painful affliction of one knee. The muscles of the thigh were contracted, and the leg was bent and useless. One day while Cuthbert was lying out doors, a man clothed in white rode up on a magnificent horse. When he saw that Cuthbert did not rise, he inquired the reason, and was told that he could not rise on account of his leg. The visitor prescribed what we may call a

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(1) Long, pp. 31, 32.







bread poultice: "Boil some wheat flour in milk, lay it on warm, and you will be cured." Cuthbert did this, and in a few days the leg was healed. (1)

Another instance may be given from Cuthbert's life. It is an interesting example, throwing, as it does, light on the transition from paganism to Christianity, which was still going on in Cuthbert's day. Monks on the Tyne had gone up the river in five vessels to fetch wood for the use of the monastery. As they floated down the river, a violent wind came from the west and blew them beyond their landing-place, in spite of the assistance rendered by boats which the remaining monks launched when they saw that the ships were unmanageable. When the five vessels had been blown out so far to sea that they looked like birds riding on the waves, the monks came forth from the monastery and prayed to God for the safety of their brethren. This all seemed of no avail, and the crowd of pagans began to mock. "No one should pray for them," they said. "Might God spare none of them! They had taken away from men the ancient worship, and **now** the new worship was to be carried out no one knew." Then Cuthbert, a mere lad, knelt down and prayed with his face to the ground. The wind dropped at once, and the ships were carried by the waters to the landing-place they had missed. The rustics were ashamed of their unbelief and became Christians.

It is evident that this miracle may have been nothing more than the ordinary course of nature. The monks would drift with the tide up the mouth of the river, and, after loading their boats, would drift down with the ebbing tide.

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(1) Browne, p. 101.



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The wind and the tide could have carried them past their landing-place. We have only to suppose that Cuthbert's prayer coincided in time with the natural calming of the wind and the turn of the tide (1).

The following selections are given to illustrate further the type of miraculous stories that Bede records:

"Among the rest, I think we ought not to pass over, in silence, the heavenly favours and miracles that were shown when King Oswald's bones were found, and translated into the church where they are now preserved. . . .

"There is a noble monastery in the province of Lindsey, called Beardeneu, which that queen (Osthrida) and her husband Ethelred much loved, and conferred upon it many honours and ornaments. It was here that she was desirous to lay the venerable bones of her uncle. When the wagon in which those bones were carried arrived towards evening at the aforesaid monastery, they that were in it refused to admit them, because, though they knew him to be a holy man, yet, as he was originally of another province, and had reigned over them as a foreign king, they retained their ancient aversion to him even after death. Thus it came to pass that the relics were left in the open air all that night, with only a large tent spread over them; but the appearance of a heavenly miracle showed with how much reverence they ought to be received by all the faithful; for during that whole night, a pillar of light, reaching from the wagon up to heaven, was seen by almost all the inhabitants of the province of Lindsey. Hereupon, in the morning, the brethren who had refused it the day

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(1) Browne, pp. 102-4.







before, began themselves earnestly to pray that those holy relics, so beloved by God, might be deposited among them. Accordingly, the bones, being washed, were put into a shrine which they had made for that purpose, and placed in the church, with due honour; and that there might be a perpetual memorial of the royal person of this holy man, they hung up over the monument his banner made of gold and purple; and poured out the water in which they had washed the bones, in a corner of the sacred place. From that time, the very earth which received that holy water, had the virtue of expelling devils from the bodies of persons possessed." (1)

Of the Bishop Aidan the following is related by Bede: "It happened some years after, that Penda, king of the Mercians, coming into these parts with a hostile army, destroyed all he could with fire and sword, and burned down the village and church above mentioned, where the bishop died; but it fell out in a wonderful manner that the post, which he had leaned upon when he died, could not be consumed by the fire which consumed all about it. This miracle being taken notice of, the church was soon rebuilt in the same place, and that very post was set up on the outside, as it had been before, to strengthen the wall." (2) Another fire, which destroyed this church, also failed to damage the post. In the third church built on the spot, the post was set up as a memorial of the miracle. Chips cut off from the post and put in water performed many cures.

Many other miracles he relates, such as the flesh of

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(1) Bede, Eccl. Hist., ii, 11.

(2) id., iii, 17. 18, 19, 20, 30.



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holy persons remaining uncorrupted for years after their death (1), a captive's chains falling off when masses were said for him at a distant place (2), healings of all kinds being wrought, fires quenched, enemies defeated miraculously, etc.; and as we have seen, the beginning of poetry in English was the result of a miracle.

English kings and saints became the subject of popular legend, of which we have just cited the example of King Oswald. After his death the very ground on which he fell became potent for the healing of the sick.

"How great his faith was towards God, and how remarkable his devotion, has been made evident by miracles since his death; for in the place where he was killed by the pagans, fighting for his country, infirm men and cattle are healed to this day. Whereupon many took up the very dust of the place where his body fell, and putting it into water, did much good with it to their friends who were sick. This custom came so much into use that, the earth being carried away by degrees, there remained a hole as deep as the height of a man." (3)

Many other miracles are associated with the relics of this king, such as the casting out of a devil from a man whom the priests had exorcised in vain, the curing of a boy's ague, and the healing of a man at the point of death (4). King Oswald's miraculous victory through the use of the cross on the field of battle will be referred to further on in this essay. The life of this king is also told by Aelfric in his *Lives of the Saints* (5).

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(1) Bede, *Hist.*, iii, 19; iv, 19, 30.

(2) *id.*, iv, 22.

(3) *id.*, iii, 9.

(4) *id.*, iii, 10, 11, 12, 13.

(5) A. S. text in Bright, *A. S. Reader*, pp 98ff.



help persons remaining uncorrupted for years after their death (1), a captive's chains falling off when masses were said for him at a distant place (2), healings of all kinds being wrought, lives quenched, enemies defeated miraculously, etc.; and as we have seen, the beginning of poetry in English was the result of a miracle.

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Similarly many miracles were wrought at the tomb of St. Cuthbert. The saint's body was found uncorrupted after it had been buried eleven years (1). A brother of the monastery who became suddenly violently sick found healing at the tomb of Cuthbert; and the garments which had been on Cuthbert's body possessed the virtue of performing cures (2); one man through contact with some of Cuthbert's hair was cured of a disease that threatened the loss of his eye (3). On one occasion Cuthbert was miraculously fed on fish caught by an eagle (4).

Another worker of miracles was Bishop John, who ordained Bede. He restored the power of speech to a dumb man by making the sign of the cross on the man's tongue; at another time, after consecrating a church, he sent some of the holy water that he had blessed on that occasion to the sick wife of an earl, who was healed. The story is told of his healing the fractured skull of a man thrown from a horse; also of a man ready to die and for whom the coffin had already been prepared who was healed by the bishop and immediately joined the bishop and others who were dining (5).

"It is worthy of notice that although Bede had in a few cases actually conversed with persons on whom these 'miracles' had been wrought, the events had in almost all cases occurred some considerable time before Bede wrote, as much as a generation before. They were almost without exception things of the past, stories told of the early heroes of Christianity in the land. Bede could not or did not name any

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(1) Bede, Eccl. Hist., iv, 30.

(2) id., 31.

(3) id., 32.

(4) Bede, Life of St. Cuthbert, Cook & Tinker, Prose, p. 239.

(5) Browne, 166-171.



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one living in his time who had any claim to miraculous power. He does, however, state that miracles were still wrought in his time by relics." (1) In the following pages we shall note some of the miracles wrought by the cross and by other relics associated with the person of saintly king or monk.

The poem Guthlac tells, in the manner of saga stories, of the life and death of another English saint. Just before his death Guthlac stands on his hill, like a Viking, to meet the assaults of Satan. He takes his stand against death, the greedy warrior, and dies in triumph. A pillar of light rises from his corpse, and at the saint's entrance into glory the whole land of England trembled.

A later religious writer and historian, Roger de Hoveden (about 1200), cites many instances of strange miracles. He tells of appearances in the sky, two moons on one occasion, five on another, of a fiery cross, of healing, of stilling of tempests on the sea, of blood gushing from the walls of a church in manifestation of divine displeasure because of the holding of the church as a castle, etc. This is significant as showing that the mind of the people had changed little since Bede's day. The following example is from his Annals for the year 1200:

"Among these he did one work that is wondrous in our eyes. For the said Eustace came to a town not far from Canterbury, of which the name is Wye, and there he bestowed his blessing on a certain spring, on which the Lord poured forth so exceeding His grace, that whoever drank of the spring so blessed, the blind received their sight, the lame their power

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(1) Browne, p. 170.



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of walking, the dumb their speech, and the deaf their hearing, and every infirm person who drank thereof, rejoiced that he was restored to health." (1)

2. The Cross.--The miraculous power of the cross deserves mention as an important phase of this subject, for there are frequent references to it. In the first place, as we have seen in Elene, the invention of the cross was accompanied by supernatural manifestations. The root of the mediaeval legends of the True Cross is in the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. The earliest mention of the cross in English literature is in Bede, in the account of the meeting of Augustine and King Ethelbert. Here the cross was Augustine's banner (2).

The following incident illustrates the place of the cross in Anglo-Saxon England. This use as a standard occurred some thirty-eight years after the landing of Augustine (3):

"For the space of a year, he (Cadwalla) reigned over the provinces of the Northumbrians, not like a victorious king, but like a rapacious and bloody tyrant, and at length brought to the same end Eanfrid, who unadvisedly came to him with only twelve chosen soldiers, to sue for peace. . . . This last king (Oswald), after the death of his brother Eanfrid, advanced with an army, small, indeed, in number, but strengthened with the faith of Christ; and the impious commander of the Britons was slain, though he had most numerous forces, which he boasted nothing could withstand. . . .

"The place is shown to this day, and held in much veneration, where Oswald, being about to engage, erected the sign of the holy cross, and on his knees prayed to God that

(1) Riley's trans. of Roger de Hoveden's Annals, vol. ii, p. 486.

(2) Bede, Hist., i, 25. (3) id., iii, 1, 2.



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(1) King's Chronicle, of Roger de Hoveden's Annals, vol. II, p. 48.  
(2) Bede, Hist., I, 25. (3) Id., III, 1, 2.



he would assist his worshippers in their great distress.

. . . In that place of prayer very many miraculous cures are known to have been performed, as a token and memorial of the king's faith; for even to this day, many are wont to cut off small chips from the wood of the holy cross, which being put into water, men or cattle drinking thereof, or sprinkled with that water, are immediately restored to health."

"These tales of miracle show how strong a hold Oswald and his rood had upon the popular imagination. Indeed, it is not likely that the influence of this victory upon the national feeling for the cross can be overestimated. The cross had delivered the Angles from their enemies in the hour of greatest need. It was the victory of Constantine repeated in England, and probably the obvious points of similarity in the two stories helped to make the legend of Constantine as popular as it evidently was. This victory of Oswald, as well as that of Constantine, formed the associations with the cross that made appropriate the familiar Old English epithet sige-bēacn, the 'Banner of Victory.'" (1)

The manner in which the Christian symbol of the cross was adopted and used is similar to the ideas of pagan mythology. Turner says that the priests of the pagan Saxons took their favorite images to the field of battle (2). Thus in the references to the cross in early English literature we find another striking example of the parallel between Christian and pagan customs, made easy by a correspondence of ideas in the two religions.

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(1) Stevens, pp. 81, 82.

(2) Turner, Hist., 5, 1, 156.



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(1) Reeves, pp. 81, 82.  
(2) Turner, Hist., 3, i, 158.



The ready acceptance of the cross by the Anglo-Saxons has been attributed by some authorities to parallels in Teutonic paganism. Stevens says (1):

"According to Grimm (2) the swastika was a holy sign among the Teutons, and was called by them the hamarsmark. The sign was held sacred; they cut it on trees as a boundary-mark, and in blessing the cup the sign of the hammer was made. The significance of blessing, or good luck, seems to have clung to this ancient symbol in all of its world-wide migrations.

"According to other authorities, the swastika is not the hammer of Thor at all, and has no connection with the hammer of Thor. 'The best Scandinavian authors,' says Wilson (3), 'report "Thor hammer" to be the same as the Greek Tau, the same form as the Roman and English capital T.'

"If we accept this, we can only recognize an added cross symbol -- the tau cross, or Thor's hammer -- which had a sacred significance to the pagan. The swastika as the sign of blessing was certainly known and employed. It is found on sepulchral urns, ceintures, brooches, fibulae, pins, spear-heads, swords, scabbards, etc., in Germany, Bavaria, and Scandinavia (4).

"In these uses -- the marking of a boundary, the blessing of the cup, weapons, and utensils, and the sign upon the burial urn -- it is easy to see the likeness to certain Christian uses of the cross, or the sign of the cross. It seems not improbable that such uses, familiar to the pagan, would

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(1) Stevens, pages 85, 86.

(2) Teut. Mythology, Stallybrass, p. 1345.

(3) The Swastika, p. 770.

(4) Id., pp. 862 ff.



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- (1) Stevans, pages 88, 89.
- (2) Teut. Mythology, Stuttgart, 1845.
- (3) The Swastika, p. 170.
- (4) Id., pp. 882 ff.



have made the same uses of a Christian figure, almost identical, readily accepted."

Of some supernatural things related of the cross itself we read in the Dream of the Rood. In a dream the poet saw the holy rood decked with gems and shining brightly. As he watched, the tree changed color; first it was adorned with treasure, then stained with blood; then it spoke and told the story of the crucifixion, the descent from the cross, and the resurrection; also it speaks of its own power to heal. In this poem the whole creation weeps in sympathy with the death of Jesus, in which may be seen a parallel to the weeping of all things at the death of Balder (1).

3. Charms and Relics.--On pages 17-20 reference was made to the old pagan charms. These lived on far down into Christian times, as modified under the influence of Christianity. They contain a curious mixture of Christian and pagan superstition. Besides the older charms, the church had its various charms. The pagan's thought ran to the Charm for a Sudden Stitch, for example, while the Christian prayed at the tomb of a king or saint and was healed by contact with his relics in the form of clothes or bones.

The Anglo-Saxon Leechdoms (laece, physician, and dom, law) illustrate the mixture of magic and superstition in the medical practice of that day. Reference has been made in the section on English saints' legends to the cure of a man's eye by contact with St. Cuthbert's hair. The remedy for swollen eyes in the Saxon leech-book was this;-- take a live crab, put his eyes out, and put him alive again into water;

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(1) Gayley, 384-386.







and put the eyes upon the neck of the man who hath need; he will soon be well (1). Also we have cited the healing of the earl's wife by means of holy water sent by the Bishop John. Holy water was an ingredient in the leech's somewhat complicated cure for "Lent addle" (typhus fever):--Work to a drink wormwood, everthront, lupin, waybrond, ribwort, chervil, attorlothe, feverfue, alescandus, bishopwort, lovage, sage, cassock, in foreign ale; add holywater and springwort. Holywater was employed in making a somewhat similar drink for a fiend-sick person; in this case the potion was to be drunk out of a church bell. (2) Medical science of that day was a peculiar mixture of natural remedies (herbs, worts) and religious incantations to the saints and apostles, an adaptation of the older charms by giving them Christian names.

In Elene healing power is claimed for the cross:

"There 'twill be ever ready  
A help to the sick 'gainst every ill,  
Distress and sorrow." (lines 1029-31)

The nails of the cross made into a bit for the horse of Constantine constituted a charm insuring victory:

"War-speed shall he have,  
Victory in fight and everywhere peace,  
In battle success, who carries in front  
The bridle on horse, when the famed-in-fight  
At clashing of spears, the choicest of men,  
Bear shield and lance. To each one of men  
Against war-terror shall be invincible  
This weapon in war." (3)

A small splinter of the true cross is a miracle working charm against the ravages of fire (4). The cross had many uses which touched the life of the people, curing sickness,

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(1) Browne, p. 165, footnote.

(2) id., p. 168, footnote.

(3) Elene, 1182-89.

(4) Bede, Life of St. Felix, quoted by Stevens, p. 12.



- (1) Brown, p. 188, footnote.
- (2) Id., p. 188, footnote.
- (3) Id., p. 188-89.
- (4) Bede, Life of St. Felix, quoted by Stevens, p. 18.

uses which touched the life of the people, curing sickness, the charm against the ravages of fire (4). The cross had many A small splinter of the true cross is a miracle work-

This weapon in war." (3)  
 Against war-terror shall be invincible  
 Bear shield and lance. To each one of men  
 At clashing of spears, the choicest of men,  
 The bride on horse, when the famed-in-light  
 In battle success, who carries in front  
 Victory in light and everywhere peace,  
 "War-speed shall he have."

of Constantine constituted a charm insuring victory:

The nails of the cross made into a bit for the horse

"Distress and sorrow." (lines 1032-31)  
 A help to the sick "against every ill,  
 "There 'twill be ever ready

In whose healing power is claimed for the cross:

by giving them Christian names.

to the saints and apostles, an adaptation of the older charms

of natural remedies (herbs, roots) and religious incantations

bell. (2) Medical evidence of that day was a peculiar mixture

person; in this case the potion was to be drunk out of a church

employed in making a somewhat similar drink for a friend-ship

in foreign lands; add Holywater and springwater. Holywater was

loose, feverish, diarrhoeal, diarrhoeal, diarrhoeal, diarrhoeal, diarrhoeal,

workwood, evergreen, lupin, watercress, ribwort, chervil, aster-

cated cure for "lent abole" (typhus fever):--Work to a drink

Holy water was an ingredient in the leech's somewhat compli-

early's wife by means of holy water sent by the Bishop John.

will soon be well (1). Also we have cited the healing of the

and put the eyes upon the neck of the man who had been; he



blessing the tools of trade, restoring fertility to barren fields, a charm against misfortune, a solemn form of oath, an inviolable boundary-mark and place of sanctuary, decorations on manuscripts, jewels, bowls, and coins (1). In one of the charms the cross was supposed to have power to bring back strayed or stolen cattle.

From Bede (2) we learn that even the very earth which received water made holy from washing the bones of King Oswald had the virtue of expelling devils and healing sick persons; in the Charm for Swarming Bees the earth and dust have magic power. Holy oil calmed the raging of the sea (3).

This story told of St. Cuthbert reminds us of the Charm for Barren Land:

"After this, Cuthbert, advancing in his meritorious and devout intentions, proceeded even to the adoption of a hermit's life of solitude. . . The place was quite destitute of water, corn, and trees; and being infested by evil spirits, very ill suited for human habitation; but it became in all respects habitable, at the desire of the man of God; for upon his arrival the wicked spirits withdrew. When he had there, after expelling the enemies, with the assistance of the brethren, built himself a small dwelling, with a trench about it, and the necessary cells and an oratory, he ordered the brothers to dig a pit in the floor of the dwelling, although the ground was hard as stone, and no hopes appeared of any spring. Having done this upon the faith and at the request of the servant of God, the next day it appeared full of water, and to this

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(1) Stevens, p. 12.

(2) Eccl. Hist., iii, 11.

(3) id., iii, 15.



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(1) Stevens, p. 12.  
(2) Bede, Hist., iii. 11.  
(3) Bede, Hist., iii. 15.



day affords plenty of its heavenly bounty to all that resort thither. He also desired that all instruments for husbandry might be brought to him, and some wheat; and having sown the same at the proper season, neither stalk, nor so much as a leaf, sprouted from it by the next summer. Hereupon the brethren visiting him according to custom, he ordered barley to be brought him, in case it were either the nature of the soil, or the Divine will, that such grain should rather grow there. He sowed it in the same field just as it was brought him, after the proper time of sowing, and consequently without any likelihood of its coming to good; but a plentiful crop immediately came up, and afforded the man of God the means which he had so ardently desired of supporting himself by his own labor."  
(1)

4. The Unseen World.--The conflicts that were waged between good and evil forces, as in Andreas, Elene, and Juliana, in which human beings were the agents, also went on in the unseen world between spiritual beings. A subject very congenial to the popular imagination was Christ's descent into Hell. It appeared in many Anglo-Saxon legends, and afterwards in the mystery plays of the early drama. The very nature of this subject afforded an opportunity for the introduction of many supernatural elements. The sources of these legends is the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, which has come down to us in an Anglo-Saxon prose version (2). This is a synopsis of the story:

Satan and the hosts of darkness are terrified at the brightness that accompanies Christ as he comes to the dark

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(1) Bede, Eccl. Hist., iv, 28.

(2) A. S. text in Bright, pp. 129ff; Trans. into modern Eng. in Cook & Tinker, Prose, pp. 219ff.



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(1) Book of the Holy Scriptures, iv, 28.  
(2) A. B. text in English, pp. 189ff; Trans. into modern Eng.  
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abodes of the dead. Isaiah, Simeon, John the Baptist, and Adam are there and rejoice in his coming, but Hell, the mistress of the place, is much terrified and says to Satan her lord: "Depart from me straightway, and get thee out of my dwelling, and if thou art as mighty as thou hast said, do thou fight now against this King of glory, and let it be between thee and Him." Hell commands her wicked thanes to close the gates of brass and resist mightily. But suddenly, when Hell and Death see Christ seat himself upon the throne, they admit their defeat in these words: "We are vanquished by Thee, and we ask Thee who Thou art, Thou that without strife or stain hast by Thy mighty strength humbled our power." . . . "But the King of glory, our heavenly Lord, would have no more words from the devils, but trod the damned Death far under foot; and He seized Satan and bound him fast, and gave him over into the power of Hell." Christ addresses and comforts the saints, who are led by the archangel Michael into Paradise.

Visits to Hel were known in Teutonic mythology. After Balder's death and passage to Hel, Hermod set out on an unsuccessful mission to bring him back (1). There were similar elements also in Beowulf's contest with Grendel's mother in the subterranean cavern and with the dragon in his lair, as already pointed out in the comments cited from Klaeber, in part 3, Introduction. "The powers of evil are identical with those once called giants and elves; the Paradise and Hell of the Christian are as realistic as the Walhalla and the Niflheim of the heathen ancestor." (2)

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(1) Gayley, pp. 384-6.

(2) Camb. Hist., p. 69; see also Gayley, p. 368.



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(1) Gaway, pp. 384-6.  
 (2) Camp. Hist., p. 88; see also Gaway, p. 386.



The Christian English writers took this material and gave it a distinctly English setting. In The Descent into Hell, Christ's tomb and death are the tomb and death of an Aetheling. He is the victory child of God. The patriarchs are noble; the soliders are heroes. John the Baptist is a great captain, and he welcomes Jesus into the Burg of Hell as a Norse captain would welcome his King in the hour of victory. Of Christ's invasion of Hell we read:

"On his war-path hastened then the Prince of men,  
Then the Helm of Heaven willed the walls of Hell  
To break down and bow to ruin, and the Burg unclothe  
Of its sturdy starkness; he, the strongest of all kings!  
No helm-bearing heroes would he have for battle then;  
None of warriors wearing byrnies did he wish to lead  
To the doors of Hell! Down before him fell the bars,  
Down the hinges dashed, inwards drove the King his way!"  
(1)

Christ's despoiling Hell of its captives is also part of the story of The Christ, part II:

"Now hath he Holy One despoiled hell of all the tribute which of old it wrongfully swallowed up into that place of strife. Vanquished now are the devils' warriors, brought low and bound in living torments, bereft of glory in the abyss of hell. His adversaries could not prevail in battle, in the hurling of weapons, what time the King of glory, Guardian of heaven's realm, waged war against His ancient foes by His sole might, when he led forth from bondage, from the city of fiends, the greatest of spoils, a countless multitude of people, even the host which ye here gaze upon." (2)

From Alfred's translation of the Consolations of Philosophy of Boethius we have the story of Orpheus and Eurydice.

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(1) Brooke, pp. 426-7.

(2) The Christ, lines 558-567, Whitman's trans.







Orpheus' wife died, and her soul was taken to Hell. Orpheus determined to seek out the gods of Hell and propitiate them with his harp, on which he was a skilful player, and pray them to give him back his wife. He went thither, and "when he had played a long, long time, the king of Hell spoke and said: 'Let us give his wife to this man, for he has won her by his harping.' Then he bade him to be sure not to look behind him after he was gone thence; and he said that if he did look behind he should lose his wife. ~~hen~~ But love can be restrained with great difficulty or not at all. Alas and alack! Orpheus took his wife with him until he came to the boundary of light and darkness. And his wife followed him. But when he was come forth into the light, he looked back toward his wife; and immediately she was lost to him." (1)

In his History Bede tells of the unusual miracle of the return to life of a religious man who had been some time dead. While dead he was led through hell and paradise, both of which he describes very vividly. Hell is a place of dreadful flames, violent hail, intense darkness, insufferable stench, and hideous lamentation, all amid the laughing of the evil spirits. From hell, he passed to the beautiful blooming fields and joyful mansions of paradise (2).

Of another type, but showing the satisfaction which they derived from contemplating the unseen world is the Phoenix. It is the Christianization of an old Classical myth, based directly on Lactantius' Latin poem entitled the Phoenix, which in turn was a theme derived from Ovid and Claudian.

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(2) Bede, Eccl. Hist., v. 12.



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(1) The A. S. text is in Bright's A. S. Reader, pp. 211; Mod. Eng. version in Cook and Finker, Prose, pp. 128ff.  
(2) Bede, Eccl. Hist., v. 12.



The older literature had pictured man in conflict with the stern and forbidding phenomena of nature. This poem represents a softening of the tastes, an appreciation of fair, quiet, summer tempered scenery. The Anglo-Saxon had looked forward to a world even more gloomy and stormy than he had endured on earth; but now through Christianity he was learning to contemplate a fairer land than that to which he had been accustomed.

"Serene is that field of victory; there gleams the sunny grove, the fair forest; the bright fruitage falls not, but the trees stand ever green, as God commanded them. Winter and summer alike the forest is hung with fruits. The leaves wither not beneath the sky, nor will fire ever injure them until the final change shall pass upon the world. . . In that land there is no enemy, neither weeping nor misery, no sign of woe, nor age, nor sorrow, nor pinching death, nor loss of life, nor coming of harm, neither sin, nor strife, nor tribulation, nor struggle of poverty, nor lack of wealth, nor anxiety, nor sleep, nor sore disease. Neither do winter's missiles, nor fierce change of weather beneath the sky, nor the hard frost with its chill icicles, smite any one." (1)

The Phoenix dwells in this goodly land, where death does not harm him for a thousand years. Then, attended by other birds, he flies far away to the land of Syria, where he makes his nest in preparation for death. The sun ignites the nest. The Phoenix is consumed.

"Then from the ashes of the pyre the likeness of an apple is afterwards found; out of this grows a wondrously beautiful worm, as if it had been hatched from an egg, bright

(1) The Phoenix, lines 32ff, Cook's trans., C. & T. Poetry, p.145.



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apple is afterwards found; out of this grows a wonderfully beautiful worm, as if it had been hatched from an egg, bright



from the shell. It grows in the shade, becoming first like the young of an eagle, a fair nestling; then thrives joyfully until it resembles in size an old eagle; and afterward is decked with plumage, brightly blooming as at the first. His flesh is then all renewed, born again, sundered from sin. . . . So in like manner the bird, old in years, grows once more young, wrought round with flesh. He touched no earthly food, save that he tastes of the honey-dew which oft descends at midnight; with this the noble bird supports his life until he again visits his own dwelling-place, his ancient home." (1)

The Phoenix returns, accompanied by a retinue of birds. Here is an obvious reference to the ascension of Christ: "In the midst is the Phoenix, encircled by multitudes. The people gaze, wondering how the devoted retinue honors the bird; one band after another making loud proclamation and extolling as their king the beloved leader of their people. They joyfully lead the noble prince to his land, until the solitary one outstrips them by the speed of his pinions, so that the flock of rejoicing ones can no longer follow him, when the delight of the flying hosts is winging his way from these regions to his native country." (2)

The death and resurrection of the Phoenix is symbolic of the death and resurrection of "every blessed soul," who "will choose for himself to enter into everlasting life through death's dark portal when the present misery is overpast. . . . Much of a similar sort does this bird's nature shadow forth concerning Christ's chosen followers --- how in this perilous time they may possess pure happiness beneath the heavens through

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(1) The Phoenix, lines 230ff.

(2) Id., 340ff.



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(1) The Phoenix, James 2:17.

(2) Id., 2:18.



the Father's aid, and secure exalted bliss in the home on high." (1) The Phoenix closes with a description of the joys of the blessed, a theme met in The Christ in the closing lines (1640 to end) and in the vision of Andrew's disciples (lines 859ff).

5. The Use Made of the Supernatural Element in Literature.--Miracles served more than a humanitarian purpose in the healing of the sick; nor were they related for entertainment merely. They assumed a place of great practical importance as a means of impressing people with and converting them to the doctrines of the church. In this they appear to have been used very successfully, more so perhaps than any other means could have been used to stimulate zeal. For example, when there was a dispute over the proper time for the celebration of Easter, Augustine ordered an infirm person to be brought, whose healing by Augustine rather than by the priests of the Britons, whom he considered in error, settled the controversy.(2)

Caedmon's miraculous gift of song was believed to have been bestowed so that "ever and anon" he might "incite the souls of many to dispise the world and long for the heavenly life."

A miracle of special resurrection from the dead (3) was "to the end that the living might be saved from the death of the soul," when they should hear of the terrible things the man had seen in hell.

St. Cuthbert "used in a cheerful and affable manner to confirm the faith of his hearers by telling them the mercies which his own faith had obtained from the Lord." This is

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(1) Phoenix, 381 ff.

(2) Bede, Eccl. Hist., ii, 2.

(3) id., v, 12.



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(1) Phoenix, 381 ff.  
 (2) Bede, Eccl. Hist., ii, 2.  
 (3) ib., v, 13.



mentioned in connection with Cuthbert's talking to a flock of birds which was destroying his barley crop. The birds immediately left (1).

Appended to Alfred's translation of Orpheus and Eurydice is the moral that the story is told in order that men might flee from the darkness of hell and come to the light of the true God (2).

Gregory seemed to fear that Augustine might lose sight of the real purpose of miracles, for he admonished him to "rejoice because the souls of the English are by outward miracles drawn to inward grace," and not to be "puffed up in his own presumption." (3)

This teaching motive of miracles appears in Andreas:

"Straightway began  
One wretched warrior to collect the folk;  
Humble and sad, he spoke with mournful voice:--  
'Now may we truly know that we did wrong. . . .  
. . . . . And better is it far,  
So hold I truth, that we with one accord  
Should loose him soon as may be from his bonds,  
And beg the holy man to give us help,  
Comfort, and aid! Full quickly we shall find  
Peace after sorrow, if we seek of him! (lines 1555-67)

The endings to the poems Elene and Juliana are of a personal, reflective type. They are more than heroic stories recited to entertain the hearers. At the conclusion of Juliana, the poet says, "There is to me great need that this holy one grant me help." "Therefore have I need that the holy one plead for me with the King of kings." Thus, by the recital of this impressive story, the poet is led to reflect on what

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- (1) Bede's Life of St. Cuthbert, from the selection in Cook and Tinker's Prose, p. 242.  
(2) Bright's A. S. Reader, p. 7.  
(3) Bede, Eccl. Hist., i, 31.







the hereafter may hold in store; and, impliedly, he hopes the thoughts of others will similarly be turned to God, so that "in that great hour we may find Thy face merciful unto us." (1)

In Elene also the miracles are shown to be performed to turn the spectators to the true faith:

"Then was to the people in the depth of their souls  
Impressed on their minds, as ever shall be,  
The wonder that wrought the Lord of Hosts  
For saving of souls of the race of men,  
The Teacher of life." (lines 895-899)

In the ending to Elene the poet meditates on his past life and the miracle wrought as he meditated on the "bright tree," the beacon of victory. The "mighty king" "poured" "His blameless gift" into the poet's mind, and then was his "song-craft unlocked, which" he "joyfully used, with will in the world," (2) to tell his fellow-men about the wondrous cross.

Aelfric's comments on the working of miracles and the spiritual use of them are instructive, for they show the light in which a prominent religious writer of that day viewed miracle working. Evidently outward miracles in his day had become rare, but he still believed in them and attempted to show that miracle working power was still active. He says: "These miracles were necessary at the beginning of Christianity, for through signs the heathen were turned to faith. The man who plants trees or herbs continues to water them until they are rooted; when they begin to grow, he stops the watering. In like manner, Almighty God continued to show miracles to the heathen until they believed; after faith had sprung up throughout

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(1) Juliana, Kennedy's trans., pp. 59, 60.

(2) Elene, 1237 ff.







the whole world, then miracles ceased. But, nevertheless, God's Church still performs daily, in a spiritual way, the same miracles which the apostles wrought in a physical way. When the priest christens a child, he casts the devil out of that child, for every heathen man is the devil's, but through baptism, if he observe it, he becomes God's. He who renounces disgraceful words and calumnies and harmful scoffings, and busies his mouth with the praises of God and with prayers, speaks with new tongues. He who controls foolishness or impatience and restrains the bitterness of his heart, drives away serpents, for he destroys the wickedness of his mind. He who is allured to fornication, yet is not induced to carry it into effect, drinks poison, but it shall not hurt him if he flees to God in prayer. If any one be infirm of purpose, and indifferent to good conduct, then if another strengthen him and raise him up with exhortation and examples of good works, it shall be as if he had laid his hands on the sick and healed him.

"Spiritual miracles are greater than the physical ones were, for they heal a man's soul, which is eternal, whereas the earlier signs healed the mortal body. Both good men and evil wrought the earlier miracles. Judas, who betrayed Christ, was evil, though he had previously wrought miracles in the name of God." (1)

The Phoenix closes with an ardent homily based on the story told in the poem: "The soldier of the Lord makes himself a nest against every attack when he distributes alms to the poor and needy; when he calls to his aid the Lord, the Father; when he hastens forward, extinguishing the trans-

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(1) Aelfric, Hom. 1. 394-6. Cook & Tinker, Prose, pp. 160-1.



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(1) *Aethio*, Nov. 1. 364-5. *Chew & Fisher*, *Prose*, pp. 160-1.



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A later writer, Roger de Hoveden, in his Annals for the year 1201, relates some very markable miracles for the effect that they had in establishing certain doctrines and practices of the church (2):

"But our Lord Jesus Christ, whom it is better to obey than man, and who, by His nativity, and resurrection, and advent, and by sending the Holy Ghost upon His disciples, rendered glorious this day, which we accordingly, name the Lord's day, and hallowed it as being the most distinguished, aroused the miraculous powers of His might, and thus manifested the same against some breakers of the Lord's day. (Some persons had been keeping the market on Sunday.)

"One Saturday, a certain carpenter of Beverley, who, after the ninth hour of the day was, contrary to the wholesome advice of his wife, making a wooden wedge, fell to the earth, being struck with paralysis. A woman also, a weaver, who, after the ninth hour, on Saturday, in her anxiety to finish a part of the web, persisted in so doing, fell to the ground, struck with paralysis, and lost her voice. At Raffer-ton also, a vill belonging to Master Roger Arundel, a man made for himself a loaf and baked it under the ashes, after the ninth hour on Saturday, and ate thereof, and put part of it by till the morning, but when he broke it on the Lord's day, blood started forth therefrom; and he who saw it bore witness, and his testimony is true.

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(1) Phoenix, 451 ff.

(2) Riley's trans. of Roger de Hoveden's Annals, Vol. II, pp. 529, 530.



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(1) Ibid., 481 ff.  
(2) Ruffin's trans. of Roger de Hoveden's Annals, Vol. II, pp. 529, 530.



"At Wakefield also, one Saturday, while a miller was, after the ninth hour, attending to grinding his corn, there suddenly came forth, instead of flour, such a torrent of blood, that the vessel placed beneath was nearly filled with blood, and the mill-wheel stood immovable, in spite of the strong rush of the water; and those who beheld it wondered thereat, saying, 'Spare us, O Lord; spare thy people!' Also in Lincolnshire a woman had prepared some dough, and taking it to the oven after the ninth hour on Saturday, she placed it in the oven, which was then at a very great heat; but when she took it out, she found it raw, on which she again put it into the oven, which was very hot; and, both on the next day, and on Monday, when she supposed that she should find the loaves baked, she found raw dough. In the same country also, when a certain woman had prepared her dough, intending to carry it to the oven, her husband said to her, 'It is Saturday, and is now past the ninth hour; put it one side till Monday'; on which the woman, obeying her husband, did as he had commanded: and so, having covered over the dough with a linen cloth, on coming the next day to look at the dough, to see whether it had not, in rising, through the yeast that was in it, gone over the sides of the vessel, she found there the loaves ready made by the Divine will, and well baked, without any fire of the material of this world. This was a change wrought by the right hand of Him on high.

"And yet, although by these and other miracles of His might, the Lord Almighty invited the people to the observance of the Lord's day, still, the people, fearing more the royal and human favor than the Divine, and fearing those who kill the



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body, but are able to do no more, rather than Him, who, after he has killed the body, has power to send the soul to hell, and fearing more to lose the earthly things than the heavenly, and things transitory than things eternal, have, oh shame! like a dog to his vomit, returned to the holding of markets on the Lord's day."

These are merely samples from the last quoted writer. His works abound in miraculous narrations, almost to the same extent as Bede's.

One of the marvels of history is the rapidity and completeness of the adoption of Christianity by the English. Christianity was introduced at a time when the nation seemed to be waiting for something new.

The old religion was founded on mythological stories of the exploits of gods and supernatural deeds of heroic men. Therefore, when the Christian missionaries came teaching legends of Christ and the saints which were full of miraculous elements, it was easy for the people to transfer their allegiance to the new faith. The Church had the material at hand which would appeal to the popular enthusiasm and ignorance. This proved a good first point of contact.

The Church was diligent in obliterating all traces of the earlier paganism, to such an extent that no purely heathen literature has survived. The few literary remnants that we have of the early period have been largely worked over by Christian hands, as we have seen in the case of Bosworth and the Chronicle.



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### III. SUMMARY.

The English nation rose from the union of three Teutonic tribes which migrated to Britain about the middle of the fifth century. They brought with them there the religion and traditions common to the northern peoples of Europe. In this religion were many elements which in a peculiar way seemed to create in the race a mind receptive to the kind of Christianity that was brought to it. One of the marvels of history is the rapidity and completeness of the adoption of Christianity by the English. Christianity was introduced at a time when the nation seemed to be waiting for something new.

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The Church introduced an entirely new subject matter for literary composition, derived almost exclusively from the Latin legends of the apostles and saints, yet the influence of the Latin originals on the form of English poetry was surprisingly small. The original English literary vitality asserted itself in the form and imagery and romantic treatment of themes derived from foreign subject matter. The early Christian literature was, therefore, a compromise between foreign and native influence.

With the establishment of Christianity there grew up many legendary accounts of native Englishmen which rivaled in interest the stories told of the original apostles and saints.

The credulity of that age, shown by its implicit faith in and appetite for miracles and charms, seems strange, indeed, to the modern reader. But we should remember that it was an age of wonder. The minds of the people had been accustomed to dwell on stories of supernatural heroes and on the impressive aspects of nature, which to them were supernatural, and anything less visible and objective in Christianity would have appealed little to them. Their emotions rather than their reason were appealed to.

The stories of miracles related in the foregoing pages were believed not only by the ignorant and naturally superstitious, but also by learned men like Bede, the "father of English learning," and one of the foremost scholars of Western Europe in his day. At that time miracles were thought to be part of the order of nature. To them in their imperfect scientific observation and knowledge, every unusual occurrence seemed







miraculous. Its supernatural element made the reception of Christianity easier than it otherwise might have been, by replacing in the life of the people the legendary stories of the heathen heroes of the older age. It was natural for primitive people to magnify the mythical deeds of their heroes, first those of the pagan hero who struggled against fabulous monsters of mountain and forest and sea; and later, when the spiritual impulses were being awakened, but before the heroic age was outgrown, the deeds of apostles and saints who fought in the great spiritual warfare against the devil and the darkness of heathenism. The Church turned to good account the fondness for the supernatural, finding in it an easy approach for bringing her teachings to the masses of the people.

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